



Advent / Christmas 2015

Die Gute Nachricht

Die Evangelisch-Lutherische St. Matthäusgemeinde

The Good News

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church

Dear Members and Friends,

As someone who grew up in Germany, I have very fond memories about the customs and traditions of the Advent season. Since mornings were dark in December, our elementary school teacher had us students sit in front of lit candles in the dark classroom (something that would be unthinkable in the U.S.!) for the first 20 minutes each morning, and we would listen to a Christmas story, a poem, or sing some songs.

With joyful anticipation, each day I opened a new door on the Advent calendar, lovingly assembled by my mother. I loved going to Christmas markets and taking in all the smells, tastes and sounds. I enthusiastically helped my mom or grandma with the 'Weihnachtsbäckerei' (baking of traditional Christmas cookies and cakes). And last, but not least, I enjoyed the lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath – first one, then two, then three, then four...

Even as a child, I somehow 'got' the symbolism of the light that shines in the darkness and becomes stronger and stronger as we approach Christmas Eve. Today, still, the Advent season is my favorite time of the year. The mystery and joyful anticipation of the days in Advent fill my heart and soul with a special awe and wonder – and I become like a child once more.

Not many Advent traditions from the Old Country have made it to California. But the Advent wreath is

displayed in many churches of different confessions and traditions. Each candle signifies something – in some traditions, the 4 candles symbolize hope, joy, love and peace. In other traditions, the candles are tied to characters and places of the Christmas story – so we have the Prophets' Candle, the Bethlehem Candle, the Shepherds' Candle and the Angels' Candle. Each Sunday thus has a different theme as we wait for the coming of Christ into the world.



One could assume that the tradition of the Advent wreath goes back centuries. But in fact, the Advent wreath is a fairly recent invention.

The story of the Advent wreath begins in an orphanage in Hamburg, Germany, called 'Das Rauhe Haus', in the 19th century. The 19th century is a time of religious revival and a social movement in Germany. Industrialization and its consequences destroys traditional structures of family and community life. Many workers and their families live in squalid conditions. So some Protestant pastors, among them Johann Heinrich Wichern, advocate for better working conditions and charitable works toward the poorest of the poor. Wichern establishes the 'Rauhe Haus' in Hamburg in the first half of the 19th century for the many orphans in the big city. The Rauhe Haus also functions as a school for other poor and neglected children.

Christmas was a special time for the children at the 'Rauhe Haus'. Christmas meant gifts, if only in the form of a new piece of clothing, some nuts or an orange. These were luxuries many of these children otherwise did not receive. In the weeks leading up to Christmas, the charges of young Pastor Wichern would get excited and ask him every day, 'How long until Christmas?' Inspired by the children's eagerness, in 1839 Wichern came up with the idea of a visible and tangible way of anticipating Christmas: the Advent wreath.

The first Advent wreath looked quite different from what we know today: it was fashioned from a cart wheel and had 24 candles: 20 small ones for the weekdays in Advent, plus 4 larger ones that signified the Sundays. Each day, as the time of darkness grew longer, more and more candles would be lit. The orphans and poor children, whose lives were hard enough, thus participated in the mystery of the coming of Christ into their lives. Their lives were brightened by the hope and joy of anticipation. They also learned that, no matter what, God's light shines even in the deepest darkness, and the darkness

cannot overcome it. God is with us especially in the dark hours of our lives.

The Advent wreath, now with 4 candles, was established as a custom in German households by the 1920s. Since the 1930s, we also find this custom in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in the U.S. The lights on the Advents wreath remind us still today that there is hope in times of deep darkness, and that it doesn't take much to illuminate the world. If we let the little lights of hope, joy, love and peace shine around us, people are touched.



Christ is coming – coming soon. My wish for you all is that hope, joy, love and peace may fill your hearts, as you prepare for the mystery of the coming of Christ – the coming of God – into our world. And

I hope to see you during one or more of our Advent and Christmas services at St. Matthew's!



Pastor Kerstin

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends of St. Matthew's,

As the church is about to enter another busy holiday season, and while still enjoying our beautiful late fall weather and hoping for the predicted and much needed benefit of an 'El Niño' winter, it is again time for a short update on recent church activity. As noted in the previous newsletter, the church has received a very generous bequest from the family of Sigrid Raub for the renovation and restoration of our wonderful historic pipe organ. Ulrike Hodges graciously volunteered to oversee this important project. By now all of you should have received a letter explaining the details. Please consider making a special donation to accomplish this much needed work; this organ is one of our major assets! The

council had previously determined that making great music would be an important focus for the future growth of our church considering its wonderful natural acoustics and its beautiful and warm ambience.

The annual picnic at the Oakland Friends of Nature was held on September 13 and enjoyed by all who attended. Pastor Kerstin attended the DELKINA conference in southern California in mid-October and was chosen as its vice-president which speaks to her abilities as a leader. On October 4 the Pastor began a new tradition - the blessing of the animals in honor of St. Francis.

During the past two months 3 new members were welcomed into our congregation by baptism: Johannes Ginsbach, Hans Christoph Karch, and Charlotte Klensch and on November 15 we welcomed the Klensch Family: Sabine, Frank, Maximilian and, of course, Charlotte. On November 7 a large memorial service and reception was held for Fritz Freund. KinderHaus returned to the church on November 6 for their annual Laternenfest, which completely transformed our parking lot with fun activity. This past Saturday a piano, violin, and voice recital was held for the young students of Jill Brenner.

Of continuing significance, the church's financial condition continues to worsen as we dip further into our reserves each month just to cover our basic fixed expenses. We are asking you to make a monetary contribution to the church's general fund before the end of the year, a Christmas gift if you like, which of course will be tax-deductible to you, in order to continue both our mission and our future existence.

Lastly, we wish you all a most joyful and blessed Christmas season and good health and all the best in the coming new year.

Respectfully submitted,
William H. Bremer, M.D., Council President

November

7 Verena Tent-Braucher
18 Elsie Kehl
Alfred M. Silbermann
25 Ursula Younger
29 Jaden Berner

December

1 Bill Bremer
2 Lore Sternberg
6 Ilse Carnes

6 Hans Kleinlein
6 Anneliese Manning
7 Edith Schober
8 Hansueli Surber
13 Elisabeth Lahman
15 Norma Hahn
19 Jutta Leibrock
23 Richard Gutknecht
24 Claus Hildebrandt
26 Annett Wagner
30 Elfriede Werth
31 Fred Weidmann



We apologize to any members and friends whose birthdays have been omitted. Please contact the Office if you wish to have your birthday included in future bulletins and newsletters. Thank you.

Organ Restoration



As noted in President Bremer's article, St. Matthew's is planning a major restoration of its beautiful pipe organ. Our historic pipe organ is an integral part of every Sunday's service, our concerts, and other musical events throughout the year. It has served us well since it was built in 1923, but it is now time for long needed restoration to bring it back to its full glory and original tonal quality.

Thanks to a recent Member bequest, we already have a good jump-start on the restoration cost, which is estimated to be about \$30,000. The work will be performed by Schoenstein & Co., the organ builder who has worked and maintained the organ in the

past and knows it well. Originally from Germany, this highly renowned firm builds and restores pipe organs across the country, most of them a lot larger than ours. David DeAngelis, our organist, is happy to explain the details of the restoration work, if you are interested.

Mark your Calendars

November 29 – First Sunday in Advent

9:30 a.m. – English service
11:00 a.m. – German service

December 6 – Second Sunday in Advent /

St Nicholas Day

11:00 a.m. - Bilingual Service
A service for the entire family celebrating
St. Nicholas, patron saint of all children

**2:00 p.m. – Damenchor Liederkranz
Christmas Concert**

December 8 – Advent Celebration

2:00 p.m. – Cookies, Candles and Canticles

December 10, 12, 13, 15 – GGMC Christmas Concerts

Please see website and bulletin board for details

December 13 – Third Sunday in Advent

9:30 a.m. – English service
11:00 a.m. – German service

Musical guests: Loosely Renaissance

December 24 - Christmas Eve

4:00 p.m. - Candlelight Service for the entire
Family in German
6:00 p.m. - Reflective Candlelight Service
(bilingual)

December 25 - Christmas Day

11:00 a.m. - Bilingual Service
With special musical guests:
'Freundschaft Liederkranz'

December 27 - First Sunday after Christmas

11:00 a.m. – Bilingual service
The Stories behind beloved Christmas Carols

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